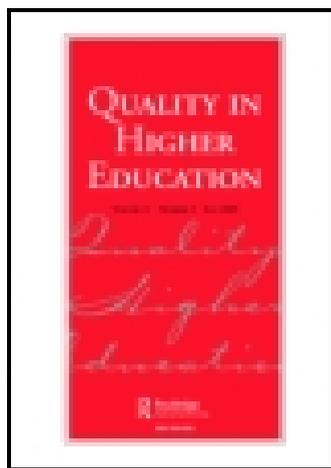


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Criteria for Accreditation in Vietnam's Higher Education: Focus on Input or Outcome?

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ABSTRACT *The purpose of this article is to analyse the development of accreditation standards and processes in Vietnam and to offer recommendations for the further progress of Vietnam's accreditation model. The authors first provide contextual details of the higher education system and then present the conceptual framework of quality assurance in relation to input, process and outcome. Third, the development process of quality assurance and accreditation in Vietnam's higher education system is described and analysed, including cross-national influences from the US accreditation model. In the final section, a synthesis of the entire Vietnam accreditation process and its implications is followed by recommendations that can be used to inform future policies and procedures.*

Keywords: accreditation standards; quality assurance; accreditation processes; Vietnam accreditation

Introduction

Vietnam has a population of 85.2 million people, of which approximately 26 million are between the ages of 15 and 30 (Le, 2007). As of August 2008, the higher education enrolment was 1.6 million (VNS, 2008) and only about 17% of those who took the 2007 national entrance examination gained admission. As of August 2008, Vietnam had 369 tertiary institutions (VNS, 2008) that are classified into three categories: public, private and foreign related. The education system is centralised under the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET); however, one third of the institutions are directly under MOET and two-thirds are under other ministries and provincial People's Committees. It is clear that the government is under great pressure to increase access while simultaneously raising the quality of higher education.

Over the past 10 years, higher education in Vietnam has experienced many changes, including diversification in types of institutions and the establishment of quality improvement

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standards for its developing accreditation model. The Vietnamese higher education system has, in many ways, been the combined image of those in China, France, US and especially the former Soviet Union. Because of the cross-national push and pull it has experienced over many years, 'The traditional Vietnamese HE institution has still been heavily influenced by the "ivory-tower" education... from the ancient Chinese, the "academic" education from [the] French and the strong research oriented HE from [the] former Soviet Union' (Pham, 2001, p. 55). Generally, Vietnamese universities are characterised by:

- Training focus: small institutional size, a limited number of academic programmes (training scope), and a small number of institutions that offer similar courses (369 higher education institutions in 2009) create a restricted market; a paucity of research on the potential of higher education results in a lack of effective and reliable national strategic planning for improvement and development; formal institutional uniformity (although there are numerous types of institutions) and the centralised nature of the system in actuality means that diversity is not really recognised among the higher education institutions.
- Centralised management: relatively centralised control of the higher education curriculum, funding and resources by the Ministry of Education and Training; low institutional initiative, since the conditions of centralisation (limited institutional autonomy) inhibit the taking of initiatives by higher education administrators and create challenges and bureaucratic rule in the universities, thus hindering the development of an entrepreneurial spirit.
- Restricted competition: not due to markets, students, or business but to state-controlled resources; high consumer demand but low recognition of this by the universities. With limited resources (teaching staff, facilities and funding), universities are able to select only more capable students (about 15–25%) (Nguyen, 2004).

As indicated in the literature (Griffin & Pham, 2000; Pham, T.N. 2000a; Nguyen, D.C., 2000; Pham, 2002; Nguyen & Pham, 2003; Oliver *et al.*, 2003; Nguyen, 2004), many Vietnamese educators have emphasised the importance of establishing national and institutional quality assurance systems for Vietnamese universities, as well as all other educational institutions. Until 2004, there had not been much research focusing on quality assurance in Vietnam (Oliver *et al.*, 2003) and the literature has provided only general information on quality assurance and its basic principles. Thus, Vietnamese educators and educational leaders are still confused about how to implement quality assurance and accreditation in the Vietnamese context. The next section presents a brief discussion of input, process and output in quality assurance, thus providing a conceptual framework for analysing the development of Vietnam's accreditation standards.

Quality assurance: input, process and outcome

Quality assurance examines many facets of the input, process and output of an education system (Barnett, 1987; Church, 1988). Input involves all resources, including people, facilities, technology and funding, needed for the entire education process. According to Annesley *et al.* (1994), process comprises the tools to ensure that the outcomes of the educational system achieve the required quality. In education, assessment is defined as 'the gathering of information concerning the functioning of students, staff and institutions' (Astin, 1992, p. 2).

Lawrence and Dangerfield (2001, p. 83) state, 'Academia has a long history of measuring quality based on inputs rather than outputs'. However, there are some global trends indicating that the focus of assessment is changing. In Europe, quality in higher education is often closely

associated with the output, which means that quality is achieved when a product or service satisfies the customer's or client's expectations. Indeed, according to several researchers, quality stems from a comparison between what customers expect an organisation to offer and their perception of the performance of an organisation in providing that product or service; quality equals the customer's perception minus the customer's expectation (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Gronroos, 1988). Although this formulation may be arguable, as 'perception' and 'expectation' are two different dimensions, it is commonly accepted in the 'business world'. The British Department of Trade and Industry, for instance, defines quality in the booklet *Total Quality Management* (DTI, n.d., p. 3) as follows: 'Quality... is simply meeting the customer requirements'. Indeed, according to several researchers, quality is what is perceived by customers. Quality stems from a comparison between what customers feel that an organisation's product or service should offer (that is, from their expectations), and their perception of the performance of an organisation in providing that product or service. Many Western universities conduct student satisfaction surveys on the quality and efficiency of facilities, performance of teachers, university services and other areas related to the learning experience. The results of these surveys are used to assure that students are satisfied with the quality of courses and the learning environment as the universities consider student satisfaction to be an important indicator of quality. In some countries, universities have been compared publicly on these measures.

In the past, the US linked quality with resources (input and process) (HLC, 2007); however, since the 1980s, the US Department of Education has required that assessment of student learning outcomes be included in the regional association accreditation standards. This requirement signalled a transition toward considering the quality of higher education institutions as their outcomes rather than just the resources, or input to the process (Erwin, 1991). Yet in the 1990s, there were debates about focusing more on output rather than input and process. In 1996, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education argued that there is a need for evaluation, monitoring and review of overall management, meaning the entire institution as an open system (input, process and outcome) (Oliver & Nguyen, 2004).

Several issues related to input, process and outcome are explored in this article. For example, should the quality of higher education institutions be measured as a combination of input, process and outcome, or should the focus be on the outcome, which means the final student learning outcomes as well as academic staff and student perceptions of quality? If the latter, how should they be measured and interpreted? Another issue is the view that quality assurance is a management system that should be placed in the hands of the people inside an organisation. Does the management system have to be controlled from the outside to assist organisations in assuring that the process is objective and rigorous? The answer to this question has international implications as the dynamics of neoliberalism place three related demands on higher education institutions: governments are providing more autonomy with increased accountability; institutions are expected to become more competitive, efficient and productive; and institutions are pressured to be more entrepreneurial (Mok, 2003; Stromquist, 2002). Questions are posed about the effectiveness of having 'outsider validation' via peer review, especially in developing countries where government offices are considered important to controlling quality in the entire system.

The context of quality assurance and accreditation in Vietnam

The history of the quality movement goes back to the Dalat Conference in 2000 where Vietnamese educators emphasised the importance of establishing national and institutional

quality assurance systems for Vietnam's education institutions. At a later conference on the establishment of a Vietnamese Higher Education 'Rector Association', held in collaboration with the German Vice Chancellor's Association on 27 October, 2002, the representative from the MOET's Higher Education Department presented five major challenges faced by higher education in Vietnam:

- confusion regarding management and administration mechanisms in higher education;
- conflict between an increased higher education scope and quality assurance;
- lack of articulation between training and economic development;
- lack of social equity in higher education access;
- insufficient and ineffective educational management capacity and standards at both institutional and ministerial levels (Thanh Ha, 2002).

Early in 2003, higher education began focusing on systemic reform because change was considered essential for building a life-long learning society (Nguyen, K.D., 2000). As planned by the government, higher education would focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and quality assurance would become an important way of achieving this objective. Previously, the MOET had developed criteria for universities to use in evaluating their activities; however, these criteria were temporary and only based on quantitative measures. Many university representatives claimed that the criteria's validity was unreliable and untested (Nguyen, 2004); several universities developed their own criteria. Much confusion existed when the government's plan for establishing a national quality assurance system in higher education was announced (Nguyen, 2004).

The Vietnamese literature has provided only general information on quality assurance and related principles; it has not been adequate to help address the most challenging issues in Vietnam higher education. The literature asks what organisation should have responsibility for the national quality assurance unit (Tran, 2000; Lam, 2000; Le, 2001). One view is that to ensure objectivity in the evaluation of issues related to MOET management, the designated organisation should not belong to MOET. Furthermore, if positioned outside MOET, it could more effectively cover all the activities of universities, including those not under MOET management. Another suggestion has been that this unit should reside in the government's National Educational Committee. Most agree that it cannot belong to a non-government organisation, as is found in the US (Nguyen, 2004).

During the first five years of the new century, four of the many questions posed concerning strategies for establishing a quality assurance system for Vietnamese universities are fundamental:

1. What is quality?
2. What quality assurance system model can be implemented for Vietnamese universities?
3. Who will have the authority for managing the system of quality assurance?
4. What standards or criteria should be used to measure the quality of higher education institutions?

In addition to these questions, the mechanisms for accomplishing quality assurance also attract much attention from Vietnamese educators. In their view, the US model of both internal and external evaluations is important to assuring the quality of an institution (Pham, S.T., 2000). However, lack of experience in using quality assurance mechanisms has caused them to rely on knowledge learned from foreign experiences, rather than research

conducted within the Vietnamese context. Several authors (Pham, S.T., 2000; Hoang, 2000; Duong, 2000) have recommended the ISO 9000 model for establishing quality assurance in higher education, although they have failed to point out why this is appropriate for Vietnam.

Great effort has been invested in studying other quality assurance systems around the world and this has led to debates about which models of quality assurance could be most appropriately adapted to Vietnam's situation. Higher education leaders, experts and institutions have conducted international and national conferences, as well as roundtable discussions on this issue. The final conclusion has been that the US accreditation model is the one Vietnam will look to for ideas (MOET, 2004).

Many people in Vietnam have challenged this conclusion based on the great differences that exist between the two countries in economic, cultural, historical and political characteristics. These discussions have led to a growth in Vietnamese literature on the US quality assurance and accreditation system in higher education. From all of this discussion, two primary reasons for looking to the US accreditation model have emerged: it is considered one of the oldest, tracing its beginnings back to 1787 (Harclerod, 1980), as well as the 'largest and most diverse in the world' (Dill, 1997, pp. 18–24) and, in Vietnam, the US higher education system is viewed as being of high quality (Lam, 2000), although the US also experiences some challenges in controlling diploma mills (Nguyen, 2004).

The first stage of accreditation implementation in Vietnam

The Concept of Quality

The MOET and most Vietnamese educators have supported the notion of quality as fitness for purpose. However, many Vietnamese academics refer to quality as meeting institutional goals and relevance of the courses offered to students. Their reference points are the specific goals of the courses; this is what determines fitness for purpose (Nguyen, 2004). Therefore, acceptable quality of teaching and learning is achieved when the outcomes at the course or programme level meet the declared goals and objectives and when the outcomes satisfy all the various stakeholders, especially the academic staff and potential employers.

The transition from élite to mass education means a shift away from small groups of prestigious stakeholders to larger groups of diverse stakeholders (Nguyen, 2004). The more students there are entering universities, the greater will be the difference between old-established, privileged, highly prestigious universities and newly-established, small, less well-known universities. Quality then means meeting the diverse objectives of all types of higher education institutions.

Definitions of quality in Vietnam appear to align with those analysed by Harvey and Green (1993); however, there are some unique differences in the underlying perceptions among Vietnam's educators that affect their conceptualisations of quality. For example, a large number of Nguyen's (2004) interview participants mentioned quality as the knowledge and skills that are relevant to the 'real world'. The interviewees emphasised that many universities have clearly stated their purposes, but these purposes are not relevant to the real world, meaning that the purposes do not articulate well with Vietnam's socioeconomic development, or workforce needs. Vietnamese higher education has received sustained criticism from university administrators, lecturers and students for being too theoretical and remote from reality (Nguyen, 2004). By criticising university programmes that are currently

considered to be irrelevant or too theoretical, students have pressured universities to provide more practice-oriented, or applied programmes. However, students do not realise that because of historical evolution and government control, most Vietnamese university programmes have been narrowly vocational and have trained students for specific professions. This narrow and deep specialisation to a specific occupation and the theoretical focus of the curriculum have resulted in the absence of liberal or general education that is considered essential in most US universities. The subjects that matter most to students, and to many academic staff, are those in the applied disciplines, because these are unequivocally believed to provide essential skills for future employment.

The Quality Assurance System Model

In 2004, when Vietnam decided to use the US accreditation model as its point of reference (MOET, 2004), the processes of self-study, peer review and external evaluation at the national level were examined. Self-study and peer review have become key elements for the accreditation process; however, external evaluation is not feasible within Vietnam's historical and socio-cultural context.

Self-study is considered a powerful approach for achieving quality improvement, as it can help universities to understand and evaluate their own practices. During several conferences held after the first two rounds of national accreditation visits to 20 Vietnam higher education institutions between September 2006 and May 2007, many universities confirmed the utility of their self-studies in providing a holistic view of their university. Yet there is pessimism concerning the effectiveness of self-studies; academics do not trust the accuracy of current mechanisms used in the universities (Nguyen, 2008). This pessimism is based on scepticism about people being objective enough to do self-evaluation, especially given the cultural importance of 'face saving'. To reduce the negative impact of 'losing face' and to assure the effectiveness of the process, many academics interviewed at the national conferences have suggested that the purpose of self-study needs to be made very clear to everyone. People need to understand that the purpose of self-study is to ensure the effectiveness of internal quality assurance design processes; it is not about showing the university 'back stage' to outsiders.

Using peer review as an external part of quality assurance is also considered important for Vietnamese higher education if it is going to adopt Western quality assurance mechanisms; yet this too is problematic. Nguyen's (2004) research found that in Vietnam, the use of peer review may have many weaknesses. This study concluded that the use of peer review would require close attention if Vietnamese higher education moves to adopt external evaluation as a quality assurance mechanism because Vietnamese beliefs and values about authority, hierarchy and social relationships could be an obstacle to implementing this approach. The fact that interviewed administrators and academic staff expressed scepticism about the honesty, fairness and expertise of the potential external agencies infers concern and reservations about the effectiveness of the current quality control system managed by the MOET (Nguyen, 2008). In reality, problems occurred when the first 20 universities participated in external reviews during 2005 and 2006. Two problems highlighted at the final workshops and conferences that were held to summarise the achievements and shortfalls of the universities were the lack of peer-reviewer objectivity and the lack of peer-reviewer expertise in the matters they were reviewing. A third issue was that the procedures and timeline for the visits were complicated and lengthy.

Authority for Managing the System of Quality Assurance

Although the present implementation of peer review at the national level is still in question, it is recognised as part of Vietnam's official process in the quality assurance and accreditation system. Interviews and observations conducted during the external reviews in 2006 and 2007 clearly indicated that to evaluate the quality of an institution or educational organisation objectively, it has to be assured that evaluating committees do not belong to the organisations that are under evaluation. Moreover, these committees must have legal rights and appropriate methods; there must be no conflict of interest. However, at present, the model for having independent accrediting agencies cannot be applied given the complex situation in Vietnam. After long debate, the MOET's General Department of Education for Testing and Accreditation was established in 2003. However, both universities and educational experts have negative views regarding the effectiveness of this new division within MOET (Nguyen, 2008). MOET strictly controls most higher education institutions' curriculum and personnel decisions, thus universities have little autonomy to operate according to what they define as quality. As a result, challenges identified in the university self-study reports cannot be overcome without MOET support. Consequently, many interviewees at the universities and conferences supported having a committee that resides within MOET. National authority is deeply rooted in the people's experience and without government intervention universities would likely find it difficult to implement quality assurance.

The issue of collective and individual objectives of universities will remain a problem in Vietnamese higher education; therefore, approaches to external evaluation at the national level cannot be determined simply by the fact that Vietnamese people tend to have a high regard for the government's authority. External evaluation by a national-level agency also reflects a culture of collectivity in contrast to the West's culture of individuality.

Vietnam Standards for Quality Accreditation

Common standards and evaluation criteria are central to Vietnam's way of thinking and, given their collective orientation, the Vietnamese are unfamiliar with what is known in the West as 'diversity'. This section provides a brief summary of the standards for quality accreditation in Vietnam. Initially, there were 10 standards comprising 53 criteria (each criterion comprising two levels of achievement) that covered all activities of higher education institutions:

1. Missions and objectives of the university (two criteria).
2. Organisation and management (five criteria).
3. Training programme (four criteria).
4. Training activities (five criteria).
5. Managerial staff, lecturers and staff (10 criteria).
6. Learners (nine criteria).
7. Scientific research and technology development (five criteria).
8. International cooperation (three criteria).
9. Library, learning equipment and other facilities (seven criteria).
10. Finance and financial management (three criteria).

With the help of international and national education experts, several documents have been created that give instructions to the higher education institutions for providing

'evidence' and to external evaluators for conducting the visits. After two years of piloting the 10/53 (10 standards with 53 criteria), combined with feedback and discussions during conferences and workshops, a final revised set of 10 standards and 61 criteria (53 previous and eight newly added criteria) was established on 1 November 2007. According to the official *Regulations for Higher Education Accreditation*, the set of standards assist universities to conduct their self-studies. The purpose of self-studies, according to the regulations, is to: maintain and continuously improve educational quality (quality improvement); account for the educational quality to official organisations (accountability); recognise universities that achieve the training objectives (recognition); and assist students and educational clients to obtain basic information for selecting universities (transparency). In this new set of standards, the two levels within each criterion have been removed thus there is only one acceptable level of achievement.

The official standards for accreditation generally have been supported and specifically followed by all universities and colleges. The criteria also reflect trends in Vietnam's higher education development at both the national and institution levels; at present, higher education in Vietnam emphasises lifting and pushing the universities to meet the minimum standards. The set of standards show that the focus has been on input and process (standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 10 with 42 criteria) more than on outcomes (standards 6, 7 and some of standard 8 with 19 criteria). This indicates that Vietnam has started down a path begun by other countries, especially the US, some decades ago.

Some comparisons for analysis of Vietnam's approach

As noted previously, Vietnam has experienced a 'cross-national attraction' (Phillips, 2004, p. 54) to some aspects of the US accreditation model, particularly the processes of self-study and external review; therefore, a deeper examination helps to explicate the current approach in Vietnam. Looking closely at sets of Vietnam standards and US criteria for accreditation in higher education, there is one overarching feature common to both systems; they reflect an essential need to encourage quality improvement in the higher education institutions. However, there are many differences in the Vietnam standards and US criteria (represented by the Higher Learning Commission). For example, Vietnam standards are based on state regulations and use numerous quantitative measures, while HLC criteria address the institution's stated objectives and mission and tend to be qualitative using fewer, more holistic, criteria (Table 1).

Vietnamese characteristics and the development of a national quality assurance and accreditation system

During Vietnam's quality accreditation implementation, international (US, Australian and Dutch) experts and Vietnamese educators expressed concern about the model that Vietnam higher education has adopted because, as Sallis (1993) stated, the essence of quality assurance is that there will be a change of culture. Yet changing the culture in any educational environment is normally a slow process. According to Nguyen (2004), Vietnam's culture and social characteristics have been greatly influenced by periods of foreign domination and evolving international relations (China, France, US and the former Soviet Union), which also have affected the higher education system. As argued by Biddington (1998), one cannot attain a sophisticated understanding of current Vietnamese society, and particularly

TABLE 1. Vietnam standards and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) criteria for accreditation

Vietnam standards	HLC criteria
Focus on input and process	Consideration of inputs and processes with increasing focus on processes and results or outcomes
Emphasis on minimum standards, according to the state regulations	Emphasis on the implementation of stated objectives and missions by the higher education institutions
Large amount of standards and criteria (10 standards and 61 criteria)	Fewer, more holistic criteria and components (five criteria and 21 components)
Many quantitative criteria	All criteria and components are qualitative
Tendency to confirm past and present achievements	Tendency to encourage preparation for the future and improvement of quality
Loose connection and consistency among all standards and criteria	Close connection and consistency among criteria and components
Unclear philosophy of accreditation: although emphasising that quality is fitness for purpose, many criteria are the same for higher education institutions with different missions and objectives	Clear philosophy of accreditation: serve the common good, serve students as individuals and serve the society as the whole

the Vietnam higher education system, without taking the persistence of traditional Vietnamese culture into account.

To understand the country, as Biddington (1998) suggested, one must begin by seeing today's Vietnam as a clash between the old and the new, between diverse reactions to the failure of the traditional cultural system and the continuing grip of this cultural heritage on the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. Yet, as Borton (2000) has observed, Vietnam, despite the historical and cultural influences of other countries, is very distinctive in its culture, traditions and beliefs. Nguyen (2004) has argued that Vietnamese pragmatism and independence are two main factors explaining Vietnam's eagerness to learn from other countries, while retaining its own culture. Tran (1998, p. iv) described this as 'the Vietnam factor'. Nguyen's (2004, p. 56) research pointed out that management models that are successfully adopted elsewhere may not be effective in Vietnam and this explains 'why, historically, Vietnamese policies and institutions have tended to be essentially Vietnamese responses to Vietnamese problems rather than holistic adoptions of foreign models'.

At present, the lack of sufficient evaluation research on the effectiveness and sustainability of the adopted model after five years of implementation has caused issues for Vietnam; it is difficult to confirm that higher education accreditation is moving in the right direction. However, because Vietnam plans to substantially expand the capacity of its higher education system, the most important and urgent issue is to establish strategies and mechanism to simultaneously improve quality.

Recommendations

In the near future, as regulated by government policies, Vietnamese higher education institutions will have to follow and implement the accreditation processes of self-study and

external review using the new set of accreditation standards. Nevertheless, Vietnam needs to review and continuously improve the evaluation processes, thus six recommendations are offered.

Vietnam's higher education system has been rapidly expanding and diversifying; there are now several types of universities, including public, private, mono-disciplinary and multidisciplinary. This diversification necessitates development of a different set of standards that are more qualitative but continue to follow the principles of implementation stated in institutional missions and educational objectives. Criteria with exact numbers and measured descriptions do not accommodate or encourage diversity among institutions. Moreover, a large number of criteria that focus more on the input and procedure than the outcome may cause difficulties for external reviewers when assessing different universities having different missions and objectives.

Continued comparative analysis of different countries' assessment, quality assurance and accreditation approaches should be pursued. Also, because MOET made the decision to draw from concepts in the US accreditation model, further research in this area is needed. Vietnam should also conduct more studies on quality assurance models and strategies that have been effective in other countries. Additionally, Vietnam should develop standards that focus more on the output (learning outcomes, research and social service as primary criteria) and that are guided by the mission and objectives of each higher education institution. This should be balanced with the need to obtain and appropriately allocate enough resources (input and process) to realise its mission and objectives. Currently, many institutions tend to focus on building modern facilities while not focusing sufficiently on developing appropriate curriculum, improving student services and procuring technology in order to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Vietnam needs more professional manuals, documents and regulations for the new set of standards. Standards and criteria without guidance create confusion for universities when they attempt to implement their self-studies. However, the proposed manuals should be flexible and encourage different types of universities to apply what is appropriate for the institution's mission.

Future sets of standards should focus on encouraging universities to fulfil their missions and not just to meet the minimum accreditation standards. Future standards also should focus on social accountability and the transparency of higher education institutions.

The option of establishing one or more independent accrediting agencies should be considered. Moreover, the use of independent accrediting agencies could assist The General Department of Education for Testing and Accreditation (GDETA) within MOET to focus more effectively on national management (the macro level). Also, by reducing its (MOET) direct control at the institutional (micro) level, universities could move toward increased autonomy. The independent accrediting agency could help to monitor accountability and quality improvement; however, unlike the US model, this agency may need the support of the Vietnam government for the first 5–10 years to achieve the necessary level of recognition, legal status, procedural acceptance and credibility.

There are many decisions remaining to be made about further development of a national quality assurance system and standards for accreditation in Vietnam higher education but it is clear that development of such a system and standards is becoming critical. The quality assurance system in Vietnam needs to be carefully constructed to ensure improvement, without creating confusion in the implementation. It needs to allow for autonomy while ensuring effective processes and approaches for accountability. The recommendations of this paper can serve as a resource for furthering the development of

quality assurance in Vietnam's higher education system but more education research is needed to better inform policy.

Conclusion

In the current era characterised by globalisation and integration, the Vietnamese context is, in some ways, similar to that of Western higher education systems; all must respond to the changing environment and socio-economic requirements. However, research has shown that Vietnam differs from the US significantly in background, culture and perceptions, thus it is difficult for Vietnam to control and assure the quality of its higher education system solely using the US approach. Vietnamese culture is a complex mixture of collectivity, deference to external governmental power and careful interpersonal relations that in particular avoid embarrassment. Moreover, a lecture and test approach to teaching and learning is strongly embedded in the pedagogy. Inexperience, cultural differences and a lack of resources are impediments that may adversely affect implementation of any quality assurance system but particularly one that may be adopted from another country. Thus, the analysis highlights many of the different factors that must be considered when drawing concepts from the global milieu and adapting them to Vietnam's national and local contexts. In other words, Vietnam may adapt ideas from international models, not just from the US, but in doing so the contextual differences and potential impacts must be carefully considered.

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